DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 102 519 CS 001 641

AUTHOR Dixon, Carol N.
TITLE Peer Teaching and the Language Experience Approach: Appropriate Strategies for the Bilingual/Bicultural Child.
PUB DATE Jan 75
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Regional Conference of the International Reading Association (5th, Phoenix, Arizona, January 23-25, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Biculturalism; *Bilingualism; Elementary Education; *Language Experience Approach; *Peer Teaching; Reading; Reading Instruction; *Reading Programs

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses peer teaching as one method of coping with larger classrooms, as a means for cultural and linguistic improvement in bilingual classes, and as a means for improving the use of a language experience approach to teaching reading. The paper stresses that (1) peer teaching requires careful organization and planning based on detailed knowledge of the educational strengths and needs of the students; (2) peer teaching in the bilingual/bicultural classroom can provide a means of increasing cognitive functioning through reflection of cultural values; (3) peer teaching in the bilingual/bicultural language experience classroom provides a way of organizing for necessary review and reinforcement activities; and (4) classroom activities can build on the cognitive style the student brings to the classroom. (WR)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED102519

PEER TEACHING AND THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH:
Appropriate Strategies for The Bilingual/Bicultural Child

Carol N. Dixon

Peer teaching is certainly not a new development. It has been used in classrooms as long as schools have existed. Yet unfortunately, even those teachers who make the most effective use of peer teachers often do so with feelings of guilt, apologizing for its use with statements that they didn't have the "time" or "energy" to lead the group themselves. This seems an appropriate time to reconsider the merits of "peer teaching" as the current economic situation may well lead to larger class size, and peer teaching can provide one way of coping with larger classes. In addition, its use in a bilingual classroom is not only justifiable but also desireable for cultural and linguistic reasons, and further, the use of peer teaching in a Language Experience classroom is a particularly strong combination.

Peer teaching may be defined as the use of one student in the classroom to act as teacher for another student or a small group in a given instructional activity. Its primary demand is that the "teachers" and the "pupils" are not chosen on a random basis. Rather, the "teacher" must have skills in the activity that are clearly superior to those of the child who is the "student." The benefits to the child who is in the student role are easiest to identify - more practice than can be gained in a larger group or whole class situation, and instructional activities more closely tailored to the needs of the individual child. The benefits derived by the child in the role of the "teacher" are no less real, although perhaps harder to see. They include additional reinforcement of skills in a very positive setting, and improved self-concepts as a result of assuming the high status role of "teacher." Peer teaching has an advantage over cross-age tutoring in that the same child may hold both "student" and "teacher" roles within the one classroom.

It might seem that these reasons alone are enough to encourage the use of peer teaching situations on a regular (rather than incidental) basis in any classroom. However, there are additional factors which make peer teaching particularly appropriate in bilingual/bicultural classrooms. For years educators have been very proud of the idea that schools were based on the "melting pot" philosophy. Ideally this should have meant that the best would be retained from all the contributing cultures. Unfortunately, since most teachers were themselves Anglo in background, what was familiar was deemed to be good, and schools drew little from the strengths of other cultural backgrounds. This led to what Hess (1970) has identified as the "family-is-damaging" or Ramirez (1971) as the "culture-is-damaging" model in the schools which created a barrier and forced the child to make a choice between home and school. Certainly on the basis of time spent under each influence alone, it is no wonder that

CS 001641

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Carol N. Dixon
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

children who were forced to make a choice generally opted for "home," and with each succeeding year became less and less able to cope with the alien environment of the school. Perhaps the greatest impediment of all was the fact that very few educators were even aware of what was happening. It was so easy to assume that somehow the child was making a conscious choice to be unsuccessful.

Recently, however, researchers have begun to look for less superficial explanations for failure, and cultural influence on learning has received its share of attention. "Results of recent research indicate that culturally unique learning styles represent a critical variable in the education of the culturally different" (Lesser, 1965). What has appeared in our schools as the failure syndrome is in fact often the result of neglect of this crucial variable. "Differences in learning and incentive-motivational styles between different ethnic groups are the end products of value differences existing between these groups. Since cultural values are reflected in the student's cognitive style, rejection of his culture entails rejection of his cognitive style' (Ramirez, 1971). Since 'cognitive style is the characteristic self-consistent way of functioning found pervasively throughout an individual's cognitive, that is perceptual and intellectual, activities"(Witkin, 1967), this in turn means failure in the classroom.

Before a classroom environment can be established that will encourage rather than reject the cognitive style of the Mexican-American* child of traditional background, some key cultural values must be considered. There are five factors which seem particularly significant:

First, in the Mexican-American culture the identity of children tends to closely tied to their families, both their actual parents, and older brothers and sisters who frequently assume the role of parent substitutes.

Second, motivational orientation of Mexican-American children tends to be less related to strong self emphasis and more related to achievement for the family or group.

A third factor which is obviously closely related to the preceding values, is the research supported finding (Kagan and Madsen, 1971) that Mexican-American children achieve better than Anglo children when the atmosphere in which the task is carried out is cooperative rather than competitive.

*In this paper the term Mexican-American refers to persons who were born in Mexico and now hold United States citizenship or whose parents or more remote ancestors immigrated to the United States from Mexico. It also refers to persons who trace their lineage to Hispanic or Indo-Hispanic forebearers who resided within Spanish or Mexican-American territory that is now part of the South-Western United States. (paraphrased from - BILINGUAL/CROSS-CULTURAL SPECIALIST CREDENTIAL PROGRAM PROPOSAL, University of California, Santa Barbara,1974).

Also in line with the values previously mentioned is the fourth characteristic that Mexican-American children are particularly sensitive to the human environment, and do best when placed in educational settings where they can relate directly to the teacher or other students.

Finally, Mexican-American children, in general, have a field dependent cognitive style orientation. The entire educational setting must be right for the Mexican-American child, for him to function at his best.

If research evidence is to be used in an attempt to match curriculum and teaching strategies with a student's cognitive style, what significance do these cultural values have for the education of Mexican-American children? The following implications for cognitive involvement seem to follow:

1. Activities which emphasize the improvement of the skills of all the members of the group instead of merely self-improvement may be more successful than those activities which place emphasis only on individual improvement.
2. Activities which require co-operation rather than competition will reflect the cognitive style of Mexican-American children.
3. Mexican-American children will profit from educational experiences which allow them to interact with the teacher or other students, so that activities involving the use of books, or paper and pencil tasks may be most effective if human interaction is also included, and if the affective comfort of the child is a consideration in the instructional design.
4. The use of other children in authority roles may be viewed as natural and desireable in the classroom as a result of the generalization from the use of other children a authority figures in the "home" culture.

Looking closely at these classroom strategies which will most closely match the Mexican-American child's cognitive style, and comparing them to what happens in a well designed peer teaching situation, there develops a clear justification for the use of peer teaching in the bilingual classroom. Peer teaching makes use of children in "authority" roles. It demands a group oriented, co-operative approach, and human involvement and interpersonal relationships are constantly emphasized. If "educational programs for Mexican-American children are to truly reflect the philosophy of cultural democracy, they must be based on data relative to the learning style of these children" (Ramirex, 1971). What we currently know about their cognitive style makes a strong case for the use of peer teaching activities as a regular rather than incidental part of the curriculum.

However, to integrate peer teaching activities into our classrooms as part of

the reading instructional program, it is important to have an instructional program that makes them legitimately necessary. Inclusion of artificial peer teaching situations can be just as detrimental as their exclusion.

In recent years the use of the Language Experience Approach to reading instruction for the bilingual classroom has received increased consideration. The Language Experience Approach to reading instruction uses "stories" dictated by the student as the basis of the instructional program. The student becomes the "author" of his own reading program. (For the Mexican-American child that may mean stories dictated totally in Spanish, totally in English, or in a combination of English and Spanish, directly reflecting his state of language development.) Its major strengths are obvious. It takes advantage of the language skills and background experiences that the child brings with him. It avoids the problem of insufficient materials appropriate for the bilingual child. Finally it parallels and supports the child's growth in fluency and control of the second language.

Currently another point may be added to the reasons for using the Language Experience Approach. One of the areas currently receiving considerable attention in reading research is the question of how children best learn words. Goodman (1965) has suggested that children can identify more words when they are presented in context. Singer, et. al. (1974) suggest, however, that the efficiency of learning is greater when words are presented in isolation. The Language Experience Approach may be viewed as a way of combining the strengths of these two apparently antagonistic positions. Language Experience stories start by presenting words in the most meaningful possible context - a context produced by the learner's own language and experiences. However, an important part of the Language Experience sequence is the presentation of these same words over and over again in increasing isolation until they can be instantly identified by the learner even in the most isolated of presentations.

It is this constant emphasis on review and reinforcement of "word bank" words that produces an ongoing, meaningful place for peer teaching in the Language Experience classroom. The classroom teacher alone simply cannot fill the teacher's role in enough individual and small group learning situations to give every child the practice needed. To the average teacher the whole undertaking frequently seems overwhelming until he or she comes to the realization that the classroom actually contains 25 or 30 "teachers." What is required is an awareness of the skill strengths and weaknesses of the students and a willingness to share teaching responsibilities without feeling threatened or guilty.

In summary,

1. Peer teaching requires careful organization and planning based on detailed knowledge of the educational strengths and needs of the students.
2. Peer teaching in the bilingual/bicultural classroom can provide a means of increasing cognitive functioning through reflection of cultural values.
3. Peer teaching in the bilingual/bicultural Language Experience classroom provides a way of organizing for necessary review and reinforcement activities.

Classroom activities can build on the cognitive style the student brings with him. Cognitive needs and instructional design can and should go hand in hand.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Goodman, Kenneth S., "A Linguistic Study of Cues and Miscues in Reading," Elementary English, October, 1965, p. 42.

Hess, R.D., "Parental Behavior and Children's School Achievement: Implications for Headstart," Critical Issues in Research Related to Disadvantaged Children, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey, 1969.

Kagan, S., and M. C. Madsen, "Co-operation and Competition of Mexican, Mexican-American, and Anglo American Children of Two Ages Under Four Instructional Sets," Developmental Psychology, 1971, No. 5.

Lesser, G. S., and D.H. Clark, "Mental Abilities of Children From Different Social-Class and Cultural Groups," Monograph: Society for Research in Child Development, 1965, No. 102.

Ramirez, Manuel, Strategies for Identifying Educational Programs Which Are Culturally Undemocratic, Unpublished paper, University of California at Riverside, 1971.

Singer, Harry, and S. Jay Samuels, and Jean Spiroff, "The Effects of Pictures and C Contextual Conditions on Learning Responses to Printed Words," Reading Research Quarterly, 1973-74, Vol. IX, No. 4.

Witkin, Herman, "A Cognitive-Style Approach to Cross-Cultural Research," Internal Journal of Psychology, 1967, Vol. 2, No. 4.